



STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

**Public Hearing Testimony
Public Health Committee
March 14, 2022**



To:

Sen. Mary Daugherty Abrams, Chair
Rep. Jonathan Steinberg, Chair
Sen. Tony Hwang, Ranking Member
Sen. Heather Somers, Ranking Member
Rep. William Petit, Ranking Member
Distinguished Members of the Public Health Committee

From:

Vannessa Dorantes, Commissioner
Department of Children and Families

Re:

Raised SB 368, An Act Concerning the Suicide Advisory Board

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) supports Senate Bill 368, An Act Concerning the Suicide Advisory Board. This proposal is part of DCF's legislative package this year, and we thank the Committee for raising this bill. This proposed bill renames the Youth Suicide Advisory Board as the Connecticut Suicide Advisory Board and broadens its focus to be a coordinating source for suicide prevention across the lifespan, including youth suicide prevention.

Over the years, the Youth Suicide Advisory Board has developed lifespan suicide prevention strategies and treatments. The board, suicide prevention foundations, and legislators have called for a corresponding amendment to the statute that established the board to more appropriately reflect its existing structure and focus. We partnered with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) and worked with existing board members to draft the bill.

The bill authorizes expansion of the board membership to include representatives from suicide prevention foundations; youth-serving organizations; law enforcement; religious or fraternal organizations; civic or volunteer groups; state, local and tribal government agencies; other healthcare professionals or local organizations with expertise in the mental health of children or adults or mental health issues with a focus on suicide prevention; and a person with lived experience with suicidal ideation or loss. The bill also identifies the commissioners of DCF and DMHAS, or their representatives, to serve as board co-chairpersons, along with a representative of the community providers or foundations for suicide prevention who will serve as a third chairperson (or "tri-chair"). We respectfully request substitute language in lines 36-41 to clarify that the tri-chair is a position that would be selected through appointment by the other two co-chairpersons.

Under this legislation, the board will increase public awareness of the risk of suicide across the lifespan, make recommendations for the development of state-wide training in suicide prevention as well as interagency policies and procedures to coordinate related services, and develop a statewide strategic suicide plan that identifies priority goals and objectives aligned with national guidance.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation.